



Chinese Warships' stopover in Port Vila amid growing regional influence

By Doddy Morris Oct 26, 2024 0



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Two Chinese vessels, Xianyang (108) and Nanning (162), spent three nights this week at Port Vila's main wharf, departing on Wednesday morning.

According to the Chinese Embassy in Port Vila, the Chinese naval vessels arrived with prior approval from and acceptance by the Vanuatu government when they docked on Monday.

"The purpose of this technical stop was to refuel, restock on water and food supplies, and allow the crew to rest," the Chinese Embassy in Vanuatu informed the Vanuatu Daily Post.

During their stop in Port Vila, the crews of the two vessels engaged in sports like football at the wharf, visited shops and the market, and bought local products and foods such as bananas.

Information published by Newsweek, an American weekly news magazine, on the 22nd of this month, indicates that this is the first known deployment of a Type 055 destroyer to the South Pacific Ocean. The Xianyang is the eighth Type 055 warship in service with the Chinese navy, commissioned in March last year.

"This port of call comes as China extends its military reach in the Pacific Ocean. Its navy, the largest in the world by hull count with over 370 vessels, continues to challenge the United States' naval dominance in the western and southern parts of the ocean," Newsweek reported.

Army Defense News also reported on October 21, 2024 that the Xianyang, with hull number 108, is one of China's most powerful surface combatants, designed for multi-mission roles, including air defense, anti-submarine warfare, and land-target strikes.

"This deployment signals China's expanding naval presence in the Pacific region, highlighting its ability to project power beyond its traditional areas of influence, particularly amid ongoing tensions in Asia-Pacific waters," the report stated.

"Equipped with sophisticated radar and missile systems, these Type 055 destroyers offer robust area air defense, making them valuable in both independent operations and as escorts for China's aircraft carriers. This deployment may be part of China's broader strategy to secure maritime interests and strengthen ties with Pacific Island nations, including Vanuatu.

"China's strategy in the Pacific Islands involves a combination of geopolitical, economic, and military interests, focusing on gaining influence and leveraging opportunities in this strategically important region. The Pacific Islands, though small in population, are geographically crucial, offering China access to key routes and the potential for political sway over critical sea lanes."

Additionally, it was noted that China's approach includes economic and developmental aid through infrastructure projects and investments, often linked to its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

However, China is not alone in making port calls to Vanuatu. French, Australian, New Zealand, and U.S. naval vessels also regularly visit Port Vila for various reasons. Australian, French, and New Zealand vessels frequently arrive in Vanuatu for recovery operations following tropical cyclones.

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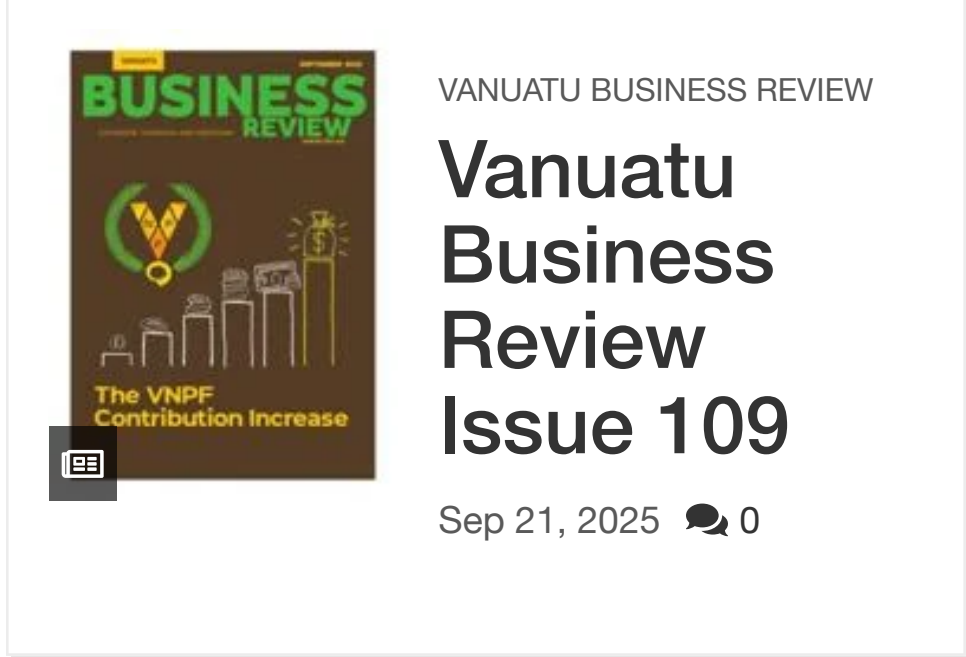
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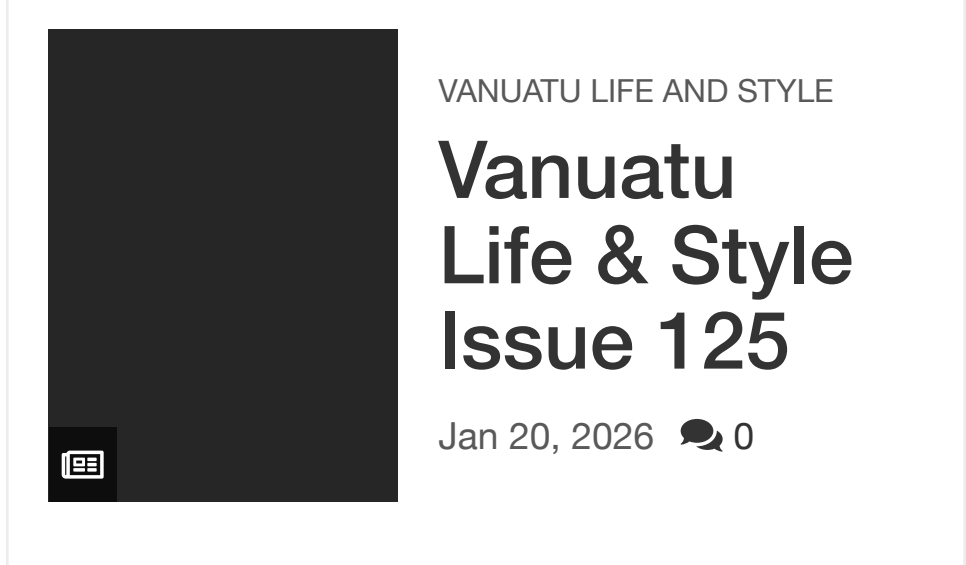
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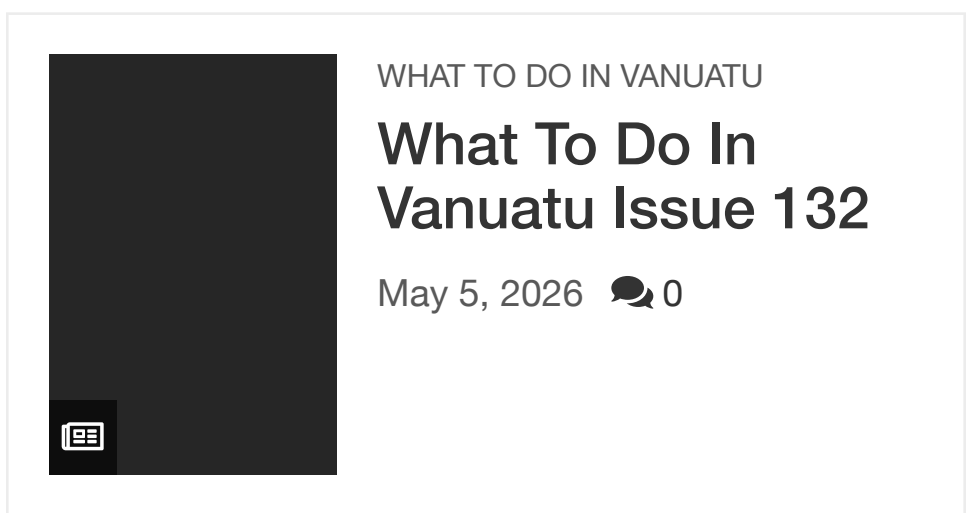
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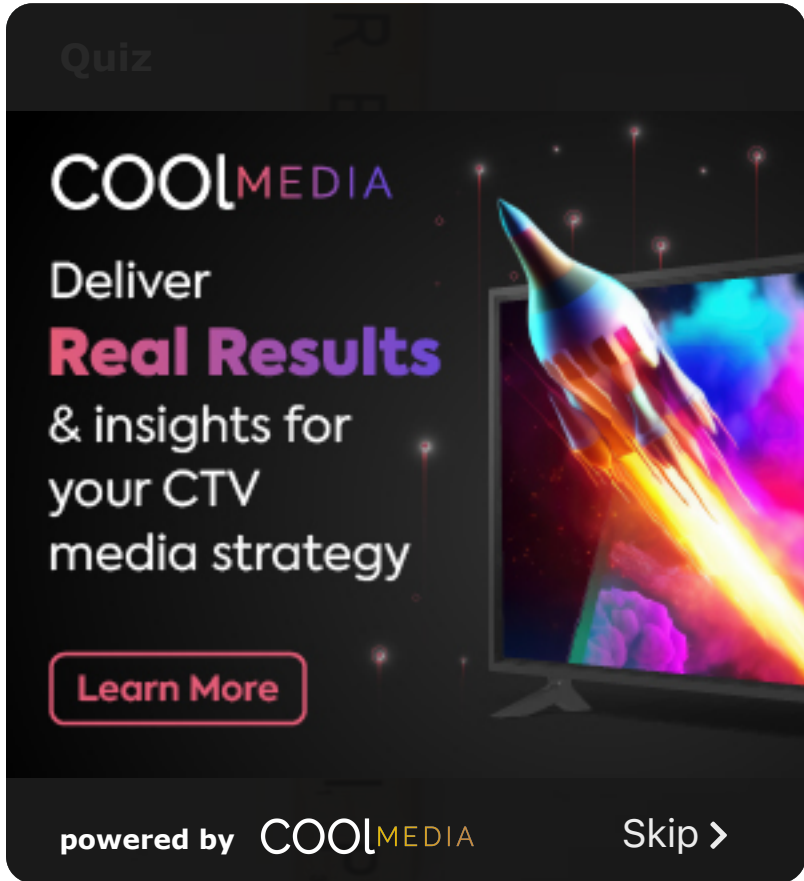
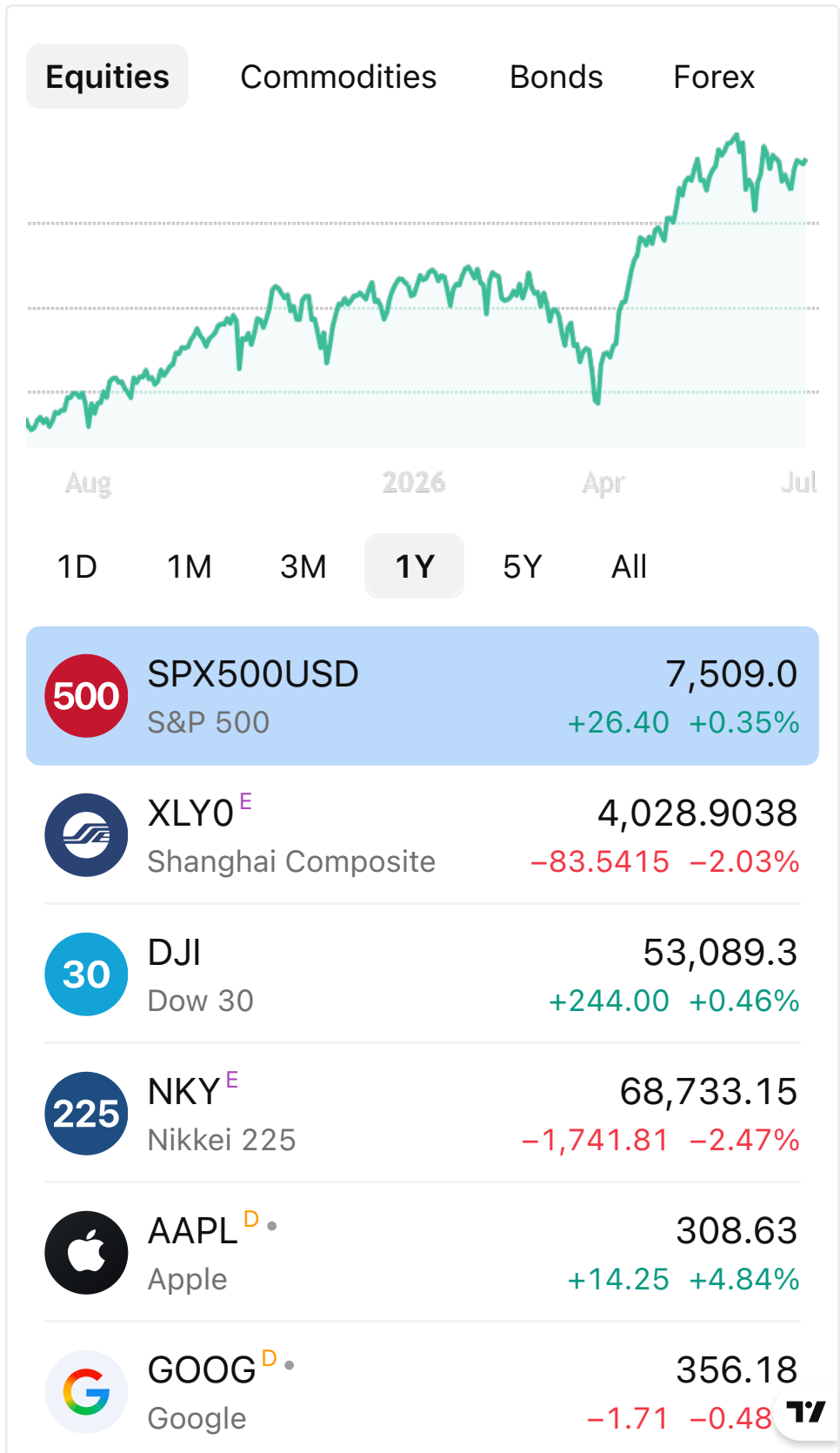
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